

Testimony of
The Reverend Dr. Brady J. Vardemann
on behalf of
The Montana Association of Churches

SB 306:
*An Act Abolishing the Death Penalty and
Replacing It with Life Imprisonment without
Possibility of Release*

House Judiciary Committee Hearing
09 March 2007

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Testimony of The Reverend Dr. Brady Vardemann

Executive Director, Montana Association of Churches

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is the Reverend Brady Vardemann, and I am here today to speak on behalf of the Montana Association of Churches with regard to MAC's long held and emphatic position on the issue of capital punishment.

For those of you who may not be familiar with the Montana Association of Churches, I would invite your exploration of this ecumenical organization [that is] comprised of 10 denominational judicatories representing several hundred mainline Christian churches in Montana and the many thousands of faith-filled people who are members of those congregations.

The people of MAC understand that a major responsibility of our role as followers of Christ is to be about doing our part to help establish peace in the world. We believe in the sanctity of life and the oneness of all humanity that God envisions for us. We believe all persons carry within themselves a measure of the light of God.

In a world torn by violence and discord, MAC seeks to be a healing presence in our communities by creating safe places for civil dialogue and mutual respect in public discourse.

Through its various advocacy initiatives, MAC seeks to bring the message of the Gospel to those places where peace and justice are absent by speaking up for those among us who have been denied a voice and by working for the rights and dignity of all people.

For over 25 years, the Montana Association of Churches has declared its strong opposition to state sanctioned killing and has called upon our Governor and our elected representatives to abolish the death penalty in this state.

MAC objects to the state sanctioned killing of human beings for a number of reasons (some of which already have been heard here today).

It does not remove the causes of misery and suffering in our society.

It does not reduce the incidence of homicide in our communities.

Over and over again, we have seen how it has been applied unfairly across the spectrum of geography, race and economics.

It is far more expensive than the sentence of life without the possibility of release.

It tends to produce the very brutality which it seeks to prevent, even as it creates ever more victims: the families and loved ones of those who have committed murder.

It undermines the opportunity for murder victims' families and loved ones to move through the necessary stages of grief in a way that opens the door to forgiveness, healing and reconciliation.

It diminishes and degrades the humanity of all persons involved in carrying out the sentence of death, even as it leads to a gradual execution of the soul.

It denies a condemned person the opportunity for reconciliation and restoration of relationship – and for the life-transforming possibility for redemption, which we hold to be ultimately the work of Almighty God – not the appropriate function of the state.

And we must never forget that execution bears the awful and irrevocable possibility that an innocent person may be condemned to death.

The Montana Association of Churches urges your support and passage of SB 306. Thank you.

Brady Vardemann: A Brief Biography

The Reverend Dr. Brady J. Vardemann entered ordained ministry as a second career, having spent the majority of her professional life in various colleges and other academic settings where she held positions ranging "from professor to provost." After completion of her seminary studies in 1999, she was ordained a priest in the Episcopal Diocese of Montana. Following her ordination, Brady served as Dean of the Diocesan School of Theology and Canon to the Bishop of Montana for six years. In September 2005, she was appointed Executive Director of the Montana Association of Churches, an organization comprised of ten denominational judicatories representing several hundred mainline Christian churches in Montana and the many thousands of faith-filled persons who are members of those congregations. She holds a *Master of Divinity* (University of Emmanuel & St. Chad College), a *Master of Education* (University of Kansas), and a *Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education Administration* (Baylor University). For a number of years, Brady was a professor of psychiatric nursing in colleges in Texas, Kansas and Georgia. She moved to Helena in 1987 with her appointment as Associate Commissioner of Higher Education for the Montana University System, a position she held for seven years. In addition to current her work with the Montana Association of Churches, she serves on the Board of Directors of St. Peter's Community Hospital in Helena and as a consultant to the Northern Rockies Clinical Pastoral Education Center in Billings. She is a priest associate at St. Peter's Cathedral.

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